



Deaf Community Advocacy Network
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To: Honored members of the House Health Policy Committee

It is my honor send this written testimony and provide wholehearted support for HB 5158-59. These bills empower parents with information and access to the appropriate educational options for their Deaf, Deaf-blind and Hard of Hearing children. Members of our community have been working diligently to ensure that the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind children of our great state have equal access to a quality education. Sadly, and historically, these children are not guaranteed full and equal access to an education like their hearing counterparts.

This bill, and the work of our esteemed colleagues is modeled after a national movement called LEAD-K. Across the county legislation is being passed that supports the LEAD-K movement. We are, with your support, hoping to join a growing list of states that recognizes the value of this work.

Please allow me to provide you with some background information. I am a hearing person, a certified Sign Language Interpreter the Director of Deaf Community Advocacy Network since 1983. Our organization provides a multitude of community based services to facilitate independence including a small program designed to engage youth and expose them to successful adult role models. It is incredibly sad when we see the lack of language that our youngsters have that is in no way comparable to a hearing child of the same age.

As hearing people, we are fortunate to acquire our language naturally. We listen to our parents speak, and we are able to process this into meaningful thoughts and feelings. These early conversations form our pathway for language. But how does a Deaf child acquire language? In most instances, Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind children are born to hearing parents and it is many months, or even years that go by before a child is diagnosed. Already behind in the acquisition of language, Deaf and Hard of Hearing children fall further and further behind. And once it is time to begin school, they have to play catch up and by the time the child is 5, it's almost too late. We all know that a child learns more in his/her first 5 years of live. What happens to our children who are not developing these critical language skills?

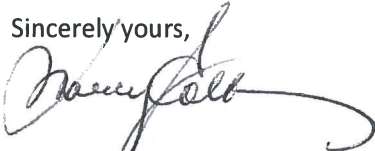
We take for granted the ability to hear. We take for granted even the simplest of communications. Good morning. How are you? How are you feeling today? We have this gift of language because we have been able to hear. However, this is not true for the Deaf person. Everything must be acquired visually. How does this impact our children if they do not have the foundation needed for the classroom, college or a job? Without EARLY intervention this foundation is not promised. And sadly, our early intervention programs are not equipped to give our children this foundation – visual acquisition of language. What is needed is legislation for parents that will provide the critical support needed to safeguard that their children have a quality education and are ready to learn.

Linking Deaf and Hard of Hearing People with Community Services

We need to demand the very best for our children to ensure that they receive a quality education. This is going to be a challenge at first, but it is our hope that we can build for future generations. Children only get one chance to succeed and become contributing members of our community. Without a quality education we're going to continue to have Deaf people living off of Social Security, welfare, and SSI. And the sad thing is there really isn't any reason that a Deaf person cannot work and contribute to our community. If we take steps now to make these changes, we can provide every parent of a Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind child with the tools they need to provide for a successful future for their child.

I am grateful that Representatives Howrylak and Phelps and their colleagues have recognized the importance of this legislation by supporting Deaf, Deaf-blind, and Hard of Hearing children's language acquisition in Michigan. With the access to information, parents will be empowered to prepare their children for Kindergarten, schooling, and eventually a lifetime of success.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marcy Cotton', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Marcy Cotton, BA, MA, Deafness Rehabilitation, LPC, BEI 1
Director

/mwc